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A Short History of God's Temples

by David Sielaff, May 2018

Then read the "[May 2018 Newsletter](#)"



This article gives a quick survey of God's Temples throughout history both in heaven and on earth. Perhaps a more accurate title would be "A Short History of God's Sanctuaries," but Temples is easier to remember. The Tabernacle was technically a portable sanctuary or Temple. Anywhere YHWH is present in all His creation automatically becomes a Temple or sanctuary of God.¹ Christ Jesus represents YHWH, and speaks fully on YHWH's behalf. His presence, His physical body, is a Temple of God:

"Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then said the Jews, 'Forty and six years was this temple in building, and will you rear it up in three days?' But he spoke of the temple of his body."

When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said."

• *John 2:19-22*

God's Presence and Temples

First, let me provide some background. YHWH can choose to be located at any place at any particular time He chooses. When He does so there is increasing holiness associated with His particular location.² This

¹ A pale analogy would relate to the President of the United States. Any airplane he flies in is designated "Air Force One," whether he is in a small plane or one of the huge specially modified Boeing 747s. Likewise, any helicopter the President flies in is designated to be "Marine One."

² This is true today in most "churches" even when God's presence is not within the structure or the organization, though holiness may be within some individual believers because they have God's Holy Spirit within them in an unholy organization.

I was raised in a Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. Children could play anywhere outside the church and attached school. Inside the church entryway they were expected speak quietly and not run around. Inside the church they were expected to talk in a very low voice or whisper. They could walk around when services were not being conducted, but they were not allowed to go past the "bar" generally reserved for ministers. Behind the bar was the altar, usually with a crucifix and an unbiblical image of Christ upon it. Children were never allowed to approach that altar unless accompanied by a minister or teacher explaining why the various objects were there. This situation is similar with most churches around the world depending upon the amount of church iconography each church allows, having an increasing "holiness" attached to the front of the room or structure where services and rituals are conducted. Pagan temples were similar with variable holiness and limits regulating access to the most holy areas. All these are pale shadows of the true holiness of God's sanctuaries.

was true with all of God’s sanctuaries throughout history and will be true in future sanctuaries of God as well. God is not limited or bound by particular structures or locations. As you read further, keep in mind this statement by King Solomon when he dedicated the first Temple of God on Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Solomon’s full dedication is in 1 Kings 8:2–53 and 2 Chronicles 6:12–42):

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain you; how much less this house [Temple] that I have built?”

• **1 Kings 8:27, 2 Chronicles 6:18**

The prophet Isaiah later said something similar. The evangelist Stephen quotes Isaiah in the New Testament and gives additional information:

“Howbeit the most High dwells not in temples made with hands; as says the prophet, ‘Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will you build me? says YHWH: or what is the place of my rest? Has not my hand made all these things?’”

• **Acts 7:48–50** (quoting Isaiah 66:1–2)

YHWH does not **“dwell on the earth”** (Solomon) nor in **“temples made with hands”** (Stephen), but His presence can be located on earth at any particular time wherever He chooses. He often chose to be present in His Tabernacle and Temples. The Temple was a useful tool for YHWH, a symbol to unify the people of Israel, be a center for His laws, culture, and a principal place for teaching His people about YHWH. The physical structure of the building was less important than the actions and relationship of the people to their God, individually and as a united kingdom under His Law.

Another thing to understand when considering the presence of God, His holiness, and the Tabernacle and Temple sanctuaries is that God’s presence can be delegated by YHWH to others such as Jesus Christ, the angel of the Lord (who is not a son of God), and other angels who can speak in God’s name and on His behalf. He gives them authority to speak and even act for Him. The term “angel” means “messenger” in both Hebrew and Greek. The term can refer to both supernatural and human agents of YHWH. Prophets of YHWH were also sent to present the words of YHWH to the people of Israel.³

In fact, the entire nation of Israel — every individual — was set apart by YHWH⁴ to teach the nations about YHWH:

“Thus shall you [Moses] say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;

‘You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself [into His presence]. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.’”

• **Exodus 19:3–6** (quoted by Peter in 1 Peter 2:9)

... only if Israel obeyed. The promise was conditional upon Israel’s obedience. Others will fulfill that function in the meantime.

“And Jesus came and spoke unto them [His Israelite disciples and later Paul], saying, ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all

³ Prophets also spoke in God’s name and on His behalf (Hebrews 1:1), but they themselves had no holy status. The messages they carried were important and should be heeded because they were ordained to be the human vehicle God used to speak to His people. Those who repeatedly ignored God’s word soon experienced God’s wrath.

⁴ Israel was a holy nation to YHWH (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9). Created and set apart from other nations, Israel was to have a special relationship with YHWH and be **“a light to the nations,”** meaning the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, 51:4–5, 60:1–3; Acts 13:47, 26:23; 1 Peter 2:9). Israel failed to be a light to the nations.

things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world [eon, age]. Amen.”

• **Matthew 28:18–20**

Israel’s task to be a light to the nations has not been fulfilled, neither have Jesus’ disciples completed their task. It will be completed by Israelite and Gentile believers before Jesus returns.⁵

Jesus was the Word of God and He spoke the Word of God directly to people as God’s representative.⁶ God retains all power but delegates some power to select advocates to be His voice expressing precisely what He wants said. As the Word of God (John 1:1–4), and the express image of God (Hebrews 1:3; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15–16), Jesus has far greater power and authority than all other advocates speaking for YHWH, whether angels or human prophets. Note what Jesus says to the people, the Pharisees, and to the Jewish leaders. What Jesus spoke came from His Father:

“Then said Jesus unto them, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of man, then shall you know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father has taught me, I speak these things.’”

• **John 8:28**

Speaking to His disciples, Jesus said:

“Believe you not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwells in me, he does the works.”

• **John 14:10**

Just before Jesus and His disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane where He was arrested, Jesus prayed to His Father about His disciples:

“For I have given unto them the words which you gave me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from you, and they have believed that you did send me.”

• **John 17:8**

We have the witness of Peter, James, and John who saw and heard the testimony of God the Father on the mount of transfiguration:

“While he [Peter] yet spoke, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear you him.’ And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, ‘Arise, and be not afraid.’”

• **Matthew 17:5–7**

Again, my point is this: wherever YHWH or His Son are (or their spirit representatives when they speak for YHWH), that is holy ground, set apart for God’s purpose at that time.

Basic Structure of God’s Sanctuaries

God’s sanctuaries, the Tabernacle, and Temples are heavenly and earthly representations of YHWH’s progressive holiness. It is a symbolism easily understood and copied by all religions around the world.

There are four basic areas to God’s sanctuaries, whether in heaven or on earth. Most of you reading this are familiar with them. They are:

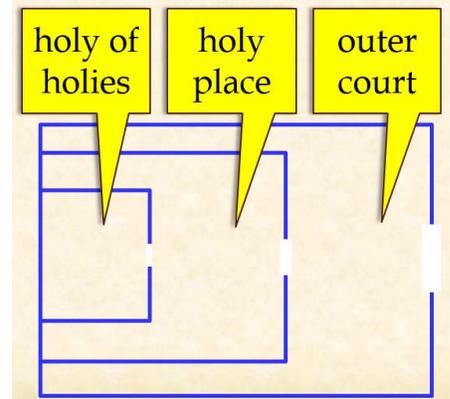
⁵ It will not be fulfilled by some organization, or “church,” or denomination of Gentiles or those who erroneously imagine themselves to be Israelites. There will even be people before Christ returns who falsely portray themselves as Jews (Revelation 2:9, 3:9) to gain earthly benefits.

⁶ A pale analogy is a lawyer advocating for a client. The lawyer speaks on behalf of a client because the client chooses not to speak for himself. In human terms, the advocate or lawyer has great power and the client is in the background. With God an opposite power ratio exists.

- A most holy place, a holy of holies. The Hebrew uses the superlative **“holy of holies”**,⁷ where God’s presence is said to be. It can be considered His most private and personal place.
- A holy place where only permitted guests are allowed. In Israelite Temples only priests are allowed.

This structure is explained in Hebrews 9:2–3, well expressed by the Concordant Literal New Testament:

“For the tabernacle is constructed, the front part (in which was, besides the lampstand, the table also, and the showbread), which is termed the holy place. Now after the second curtain is a tabernacle which is termed the holy of holies.”



Holiness of God’s Sanctuaries

- An outer court of sanctuary holiness is where priests and Israelite men participate in sacrifices. We do not know who is allowed in these areas in heaven.⁸
- Territory outside the sanctuary has no holiness. It is totally secular and mundane.

We do not know how this structure works out in heaven. We only know about the holiness of God’s sanctuaries here on earth, as they are constructed to God’s specifications. Once the Tabernacle was established, and thenceforward, Israelites could only bring sacrifices to YHWH at places He designated. And yes, exceptions were made for prophets such as Elijah at Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:1–40).

Read my September 2013 Commentary, [“What Is a Temple?”](#)

The First Earthly Sanctuary: Eden and God’s Presence

YHWH created the heavens and the earth through the agency of the *El* later born of Mary, called Immanuel or “God with us” (John 1:1–4; Philippians 2:5–7), named Jesus (His name means “YHWH saves”). He was designated as **“the beginning of the creation of God”** in Revelation 3:14, Colossians 1:15–17).⁹ Of course, YHWH’s presence was in His creation and remains throughout that creation (Psalm 139:7–8; Job 26:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10). That allows Him to intervene in His creation whenever He chooses to do so and the biblical record indicates He does so to fulfill His will.

The third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2–4) is where God’s primary abode is currently located. It contains His palace, which is the Temple in heaven where the spirit beings gather for various functions such as ceremonies, occasions of praise, for pronouncements of judgment, and for announcements of decrees by YHWH.

After Adam was created and Eve from him, God on occasion chose to walk in the garden within the land called Eden. He did so in particular just after Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:8). Here too, the most holy place was where YHWH’s presence was, and that was in the midst of the Garden. The Garden itself was less holy. The Garden was within Eden, Eden was more holy than the wilderness to the east of Eden.

Details of the holiness or “set apart” aspects of the Edenic sanctuary relate directly to the heavenly structure in heaven, and to the later earthly Tabernacle and Temples in such things as:

- (1) the midst of the garden,
- (2) the Garden within Eden,

⁷ The King James Version does not use the phrase “holy of holies” but usually uses the phrase “the most holy.” However, the Hebrew is clearly a superlative, “holy of holies,” as it is used in most modern translations. Its usage is similar to Hebrew usage of phrases such as “king of kings,” “lord of lords,” “day of days,”

⁸ In a future Temple before Christ returns, Gentiles will be able to bring sacrifices to this part of the sanctuary (Revelation 11:2). There is controversy whether this is legally proper and allowed, or whether it will be an offense to God.

⁹ [“How Did Jesus Become God?”](#) explains who and what God is. God is not a trinity of beings. Remember Jesus’ words, **“And now, O Father, glorify you me with your own self with the glory which I had with you before the world was”** (John 17:5).

- (3) the land of Eden, and the altar of Cain and Abel outside the garden, and
 (4) **“the land of Nod, on the east of Eden”** (Genesis 4:16).

These four basic elements are best explained in Dr. Martin’s article, [“The Temple Symbolism in Genesis”](#) and in [“Chapter 15: The Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel, and the Temple of God”](#) of Dr. Martin’s book, [The Temples That Jerusalem Forgot](#) (hereafter referenced as *Temples*). Moses and the people of Israel understood the tabernacle/temple layout by the story of our first parents in the Genesis narrative. A chart comparing the elements of Eden with the elements of the Tabernacle and Temples of YHWH are at the [“ELM Timeline Project”](#) page TL-2b, diagrammed by Henry Dye and Tim Parrott.

“The tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise [garden] of God” (Revelation 2:7). The tree is there now. It will be in New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:2, 14) after that city goes from the old heaven to a new earth.¹⁰

The Tabernacle, a Movable Sanctuary

Stone temples dedicated to various pagan gods existed long before God ordered the Tabernacle to be made. In those days the Gentile nations knew about YHWH but worshipped their own local gods.¹¹

When Moses was first at the base of Mt. Sinai, YHWH’s presence was there. Moses noticed a burning bush and went to investigate. An angelic representative of YHWH explained the interesting sight to Moses and introduced him to the concept that God’s presence makes a location to be **“holy ground”**:

“The angel of YHWH appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: ... And Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.’”

And when YHWH saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, ‘Moses, Moses.’ And he said, ‘Here am I.’ And he said, ‘Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground.”

• Exodus 3:2–5

At Mt. Sinai God instructed Moses to construct a Tabernacle, a tent, as a portable sanctuary where God’s holy presence was manifested. He was to make the Tabernacle according to a “pattern” (in Hebrew, *tabnith*):

“And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, after the pattern [tabnith] of the tabernacle, and the pattern [tabnith] of all the instruments thereof, even so shall you make it.”

• Exodus 25:8–9

The basic requirements of the Tabernacle and its materials are set out in Exodus chapters 25:1–26:1.

**“I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar:
 I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest’s office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am YHWH their God,
 that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt,
 that I may dwell among them: I am YHWH their God.”**

• Exodus 29:44–46

¹⁰ An interesting thought is presented by W. Creighton Marlowe in his article “Eden,” ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 371:

“The significance of connecting the first couple’s paradise of God’s presence with the future site of the temple (cf. Gihon Spring) symbolizing God’s presence and the promised Palestinian paradise (cf. Isa. 51:3; Zech. 14:8; Rev. 22:1–2) should not be missed. In ancient Near Eastern mythology a garden paradise of two rivers is where the divine council meets; and in pseudepigraphal literature Eden is associated with a “heaven” of salvation for the faithful.”

¹¹ Dr. Martin’s articles [“The Secret of Ancient Religion Revealed! - Part 1”](#) and [“The Secret of Ancient Religion Revealed! - Part 2.”](#) Then read an additional point of view in my article, [“Idolatry and the Sons of God.”](#) The two views are complementary.

The preparations and construction are in Exodus 35:4–40:33. God’s glory (His presence) entered the Tabernacle after it was dedicated to YHWH (Exodus 40:34–38).

This Tabernacle, its furniture, and utensils were carried by the people of Israel throughout their journeys from Sinai, through their wilderness wanderings for 40 years, and into the Promised Land. God’s presence led the people by the pillar of smoke during the day and the pillar of fire at night (Exodus 13:21–22, 14:19–24; Numbers 12:5, 14:14, 16:19, 42; Deuteronomy 31:15; Nehemiah 9:12, 19).

The Tabernacle was made at Sinai, then a pillar led the Israelite tribes to the wilderness (38 of the 40 years wandering were at Kadesh) sustained by YHWH supernaturally (Deuteronomy 29:3–7). During the entire time of the wilderness travels, the pillar remained to remind them of YHWH’s presence in the Holy of Holies. Yet the people of Israel continually sinned against YHWH’s instructions, even with gross idolatry, and YHWH prophesied more disobedience after Moses died (Deuteronomy 31:16–18).

The Jordan River was crossed and the Israelites stayed at Gilgal near Jericho in the land of Canaan. After Israel entered the Promised Land, the location designated by God was at Shiloh (Joshua 18:1). The Tabernacle stayed at Shiloh, an area centralized for easy access by all the tribes.¹²

During Eli’s tutelage of the young future prophet Samuel, the ark was taken into battle as an object of intrinsic power, rather than a symbol of YHWH’s salvation and grant of victory. Israel lost the battle and the Philistines captured the ark. They returned it to Israel but there is no mention it went back inside the Tabernacle. It seems to have been moved to Nob and definitely to Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39, 21:29).

The Ark of the Covenant was taken from the town of Baale of Judah (2 Samuel 6:2), also known as Kirjathjearim and brought to Jerusalem by King David of Israel in anticipation that one of his sons would build a Temple to unify and solidify the reigns of David’s descendants (2 Samuel chapter 7; 1 Chronicles chapter 22). God said to David who desired to build a Temple,

“Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.”

• **2 Samuel 7:6**

Regarding the Tabernacle:

“Hence, it was that there were now two tabernacles, the original one with its altar at Gibeon, and the new one with the original ark in Jerusalem, both under the protection of the king. Both, however, were soon to be superseded by the building of a temple. The altar at Gibeon continued in use till the time of Solomon. Of all the actual material of the tabernacle, the ark alone remained unchanged in the temple. The tabernacle itself, with its sacred vessels, was brought up to Jerusalem, and was preserved, apparently, as a sacred relic in the temple (1 Kings 8:4). Thus, after a history of more than 200 years, the tabernacle ceases to appear in history.”

• **“Tabernacle,” ISBE, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia***

At the dedication of the Temple, the ark was placed in Solomon’s Temple for YHWH. So was the Tabernacle, though no one seems to know exactly where it was placed ... but it was in the Temple:

“And they brought up the ark of YHWH, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up.”

• **1 Kings 8:4**

¹² Some kind of semi-permanent structure was made there because the structure was twice identified by the common term “temple” (*heykal* in Hebrew) rather than “tabernacle” (*mishkan*). Perhaps a protective wall and outbuildings were around the Tabernacle and the entire complex was called a “temple,” 1 Samuel 1:9:

“So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of YHWH.”

1 Samuel 3:3:

“And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of YHWH, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; ...”

Solomon's Temple of Stone for YHWH

God chose a particular location in the city of Jebus in the time of King David for His Temple. This city later became known as Jerusalem, the City of David. The location God chose was above and west of the Gihon Spring at **“the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite,”** 2 Samuel 24:18. Read 2 Samuel 24:16–25 for that story. The Gihon Spring provided sufficient water for the sacrificial system of the Temple as well as water for the city.

King David desired to build a stone sanctuary for YHWH, a permanent Temple structure to unify all the tribes of the people of Israel, and be a center for the law and culture, and a central place for teaching the people about YHWH. David was not allowed to build the Temple, but God promised one of his sons would build it.

After King David's 40 year reign (first as King of Judah and later as King of all Israel), his son Solomon was chosen by YHWH to construct the Temple that David wanted built (1 Kings chapter 1; 1 Chronicles chapter 17). David gathered all the materials needed for a luxurious structure, and then the people were invited to contribute generously to adorn the Temple.

It was to be constructed according to specifications that David received from YHWH (1 Chronicles 28:2–6, 9–18).¹³ Unlike Moses, David received the pattern [*tabnith*] **“in writing”** from YHWH (1 Chronicles 28:19). The construction process is told in 1 Kings chapters 5–6 and 8 corresponding to 2 Chronicles chapters 2–6.¹⁴ A garden motif carved in the cedar interior of the Temple and the exterior doors (1 Kings chapter 6) reflect the original Edenic heritage of God's sanctuary. A good synopsis is given in the article **“[Temple](#)”** in ISBE:

“The Temple was founded in the 4th year of Solomon's reign (1 Kings 6:1), and occupied 7½ years in building (1 Kings 6:38); the royal buildings occupied 13 years (1 Kings 7:1) — 20 years in all (the two periods, however, may in part synchronize).

On the completion of the Temple, the ark was brought up, in the presence of a vast assemblage, from Zion, and, with innumerable sacrifices and thanksgiving, was solemnly deposited in the Holy of Holies (1 Kings 8:1–21; 2 Chronicles 5; 6:1–11). The Temple itself was then dedicated by Solomon in the noble prayer recorded in 1 Kings 8:22–61; 2 Chronicles 6:12–42, followed by lavish sacrifices, and a 14 days' feast. At its inauguration the house was filled with the 'glory' of Yahweh (1 Kings 8:10–11; 2 Chronicles 5:13–14).”

As in the time of Moses, the mention of the **“glory of YHWH”** in 1 Kings 8:10–11 and 2 Chronicles 5:13–14 (the King James Version has **“the glory of the Lord”**) coming to the Temple indicated YHWH's approval and His presence at the Temple.

After Solomon sinned by worshipping other gods (1 Kings 11:1–13), God's punishment was — after his death — to split David and Solomon's kingdom into a northern kingdom of Israel and a southern kingdom of Judah. The Temple remained under control of the kingdom of Judah. The other ten tribes (the half tribes Ephraim and Manasseh were counted as one tribe) made up the northern kingdom of Israel. The kings and people of both kingdoms repeatedly rebelled from exclusively worshipping YHWH. Their outrageous idolatry over time and murder of YHWH's prophets in both the north and south brought YHWH's judgment upon both kingdoms.

YHWH first judged the evils of the kings, rulers, and people of the northern kingdom of Israel, who were so idolatrous they received the ultimate divine punishment: destruction and exile from the land God promised to them. The people of the northern kingdom of Israel were killed or taken captive to foreign lands.

About 150 years later, the kings, rulers, and people of the southern kingdom of Judah likewise rebelled repeatedly against YHWH and were judged for worshipping other gods. Note Manasseh, the King of Judah:

¹³ No dimensions are given in the Bible for the courtyard for the Solomonic Temple. Cory D. Crawford, “Between Shadow and Substance: The Historical Relationship of Tabernacle and Temple in Light of Architecture and Iconography” in *Levites and Priests in History and Tradition*, ed. by Mark A. Leuchter and Jeremy M. Hutton (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 125.

¹⁴ See my articles: **“[The Pattern of the Temple](#)”** and the side-by-side accounts of Second Kings and First Chronicles about Solomon's construction of the Temple in **“[Israel and Judah: 17. Solomon's Early Reign](#)”** and **“[Israel and Judah: 18. Temple Interior and Dedication](#).”**

“He built altars in the house of YHWH, of which YHWH said, ‘In Jerusalem will I put my name.’ And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of YHWH. And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of YHWH, to provoke him to anger.”

• **2 Kings 21:4–6**

Because of evil kings, the people of Judah also became corrupt and idolatrous. God gave them repeated warnings, punishments were threatened, and then carried out. The kings were deposed, Jerusalem conquered, the Temple implements seized by the Babylonians, the city walls torn down, and the Temple burnt down (2 Kings 25:9–10; 2 Chronicles 36:18–19; Jeremiah 52:14). So ended the first Temple built by Solomon. The people of Judah remained in exile for 70 years. Then Cyrus, a Persian king, allowed the Israelite people to return to Israel.

We know exactly when Solomon began construction of the Temple. It was in the 4th year, 2nd month of Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 6:1), 480 years after Israel left Egypt (2 Chronicles 3:2). Unfortunately, we cannot be sure what year that corresponds to in our calendar. We also know from Scripture precisely when the Temple of Solomon was destroyed ...

“... in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: And he burnt the house of YHWH, and the king’s house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man’s house burnt he with fire.”

• **2 Kings 25:8–9**

Again, we have a precise biblical date indicating when the Temple was burnt, but secular dating of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign is not certain. Due to chronological and textual problems, most scholars deny the clear 70-year captivity of the people of Israel spoken of by Jeremiah, Daniel, and other biblical writings.¹⁵ Furthermore, according to the account of the prophet Jeremiah, Solomon’s Temple was not only burnt down but it was also dismantled. **“The stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street”** (Lamentations 4:1). The 70 years of captivity spoken of by Jeremiah began before this Temple was destroyed.

The complete evidence of the Gihon location of all the Jerusalem Temples (and not on the so-called “temple mount” is in Dr. Martin’s book, [*The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot*](#).

(False Israelite Temples)

Israelite sanctuaries could be legally placed only at locations God chooses for them to be built; anywhere else is illegal according to Mosaic Law:

“But unto the place which YHWH your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall you seek, and thither you shall come: And thither you shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks.”

• **Deuteronomy 12:5–6**

Such offerings, sacrifices, and tithes could only be done where and when God designated.

“Then there shall be a place which YHWH your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall you bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices,

¹⁵ This is according to the chronological work of Dr. Martin, compiled and charted in the “[ELM Timeline Project](#),” pages TL-4b to TL-4h. The Timeline gives Dr. Martin’s reasons for differing with standard chronology. Dr. Martin held to the 70 years of exile mentioned several times in the Bible. See my April 2012 Commentary, “[Jeremiah and 70 Years](#)” and much more information in Dr. Martin’s article, “[Jeremiah, Part 3](#).”

your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which you vow unto YHWH.”

• **Deuteronomy 12:11**

Later in Deuteronomy chapter 12, God tells where the offerings must not be made. **“Take heed to yourself that you offer not your burnt offerings in every place that you see.”** (Deuteronomy 12:13). This was said because the people knew Abraham could perform sacrifices anywhere he chose to do so. This changed under Moses.

During and after the time of Moses, the rituals and sacrifices could only be performed where God said they could be done. That was wherever the pillar of cloud and fire stopped, there the Tabernacle stopped. Israel remained at that location so long as the pillar stopped. During the time of Moses the people had a supernatural event happening in their midst at all times! They learned to ignore it.

After Solomon’s death, ten Israelite tribes left the worship of YHWH. Those who did not reject YHWH moved south to live in Judah. Many forget there were other temples built by Israelites, and these are well known. These sites were illegitimate according to Mosaic Law because they were located without God’s approval. Jeroboam purposefully led the people of the ten tribes into eventual idolatry (1 Kings 11:23–40):

“And Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of YHWH at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.’

Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.’ And he set the one in Bethel [meaning “house of God”], and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made an HOUSE of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.”

• **1 Kings 12:26–31**

These places of worship, called “houses” Initially were temples to YHWH. They were not temples to Baal. The worship of Baal came later during the time of King Ahaz of Samaria (the other name for the northern kingdom of Israel). Jeroboam simply did not want “his” people to go and worship at Jerusalem. He wanted people to worship YHWH, but **NOT** at the site chosen by God. The sites of Bethel and Dan deteriorated, but later had a resurgence before the northern kingdom of Israel was eliminated by God’s agent Assyria.

Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah — the 2nd Temple

After Solomon’s Temple was destroyed and after the 70 years of Judah’s captivity, YHWH moved the heart of Cyrus, King of Persia, to allow all Israelites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple.¹⁶ However, the Temple reconstruction did not begin immediately upon their return. YHWH criticized this lack of action through his prophet Haggai.¹⁷

Construction eventually began with a man called Zerubbabel, with the assistance of Ezra, Nehemiah, and the prophecies of both the Book of Haggai (both chapters) and Zechariah (chapter 4). Prof. Richard Elliot Friedman explains the nature of this rebuilt structure:

“The books of Ezra and Nehemiah contain the story of the return of the Jews to rebuild their country, their capital city, and their Temple after decades of domination by the Babylonians. ...

The story in these two books contains no miracles, no angels, no divine appearances. God is

¹⁶ See [“Iran in Prophecy.”](#) Today Iran (ancient Persia) is an enemy of Israel. A future Iranian leader like Cyrus is prophesied to help Israelis return to the land God promised to them. They will never again be dispossessed from that land after Christ returns.

¹⁷ See [“Haggai and the Temple,”](#) [“The Book of Haggai,”](#) and [“Book of Haggai, Time Prophecies”](#) for details on the restored Temple in Jerusalem. This was the Temple that the pilgrim Aristeas visited around 285 BC. He told of the extensive water system in Jerusalem serving the Temple operations.

never said to have spoken to anyone. The Temple is rebuilt, but this second Temple contains no Tabernacle, no ark,¹⁸ no tablets, no Nehushtan [the brazen serpent on a pole, Numbers 21:1–9]. No glory or cloud appears on its dedication day.

• [Richard Elliot Friedman, The Disappearance of God, chapter 1](#)

The prophesied supernatural “acceptance” prophesied in Ezra and Nehemiah’s time did not happen then. The people prayed and asked God’s Spirit to come into that Temple. The prophecy they wanted fulfilled was in Haggai 2:7, 9: **“I will [future tense] fill this house with glory, says YHWH ... The glory of this latter house shall be [future] greater than of the former, says YHWH ...”** YHWH did not fill the Temple with glory then.

Read all of John 2:13–25. The glory came later with the presence of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, who performed unspecified miracles and said His body was the Temple (John 2:19–22). It shows the glory of the Son of God being in the Temple during that Passover season, cleansing the Temple. The lack of a manifestation of a cloud or fire from heaven did not mean God disapproved of the Zerubbabel Temple or later reconstructions. In fact, just the opposite was true.

We have Jesus’ testimony of the legitimacy of the Zerubbabel Temple and later Temples. He called the Herodian Temple **“My Father’s house”** in John 2:16. The courts of the Temple were used for merchandizing. In Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17, and Luke 19:46 Jesus spoke for God the Father, calling the Temple **“My house.”** The house of YHWH was misused. Jesus quoted Jeremiah 7:11 when He cast out the moneychangers:

“Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, says YHWH.”

• [Jeremiah 7:11](#)

Everyone listening to Jesus’ words understood the reference and they knew His words were true. His criticism indicated the Temple was legitimate and He did not want it defiled.

The Zerubbabel Temple, the later expansion by Simon the Hasmonean, and the Herodian Temple expansion were all legitimate, and built at the same location.

(Two False Jewish Temples in Egypt)

There were two illegitimate Jewish temples built in Egypt. The earliest temple was at Elephantine on the Nile River in southern Egypt (Ezekiel 29:10, Syene is Elephantine, today known as Aswan in south Egypt). The Jewish historian Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, 4:611) says the **“river Nile is navigable as far as the city called Elephantine ... cataracts hindering ships from going any farther [south].”** In 1893, documents were discovered which told about an early Jewish temple in Egypt. Some of these documents are online in English:

“Now our ancestors built this temple in the fortress of Yeb [Elephantine Island in the Nile River] in the days of the kingdom of Egypt; and when Cambyses came to Egypt [525 BC] he found it (already) constructed. They (the Persians) knocked down all the temples of the Egyptian gods; but no one damaged this temple.”

• [“Petition to Authorize Elephantine Temple Reconstruction”](#)

This Jewish Egyptian temple survived about **115 years** more after the Persian conquest of Egypt in **525 BC**.

¹⁸ Jeremiah 3:14–16 says no ark of the covenant will be in any future Temple, not even in the Ezekiel Temple:

“Turn, O backsliding children, says YHWH; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: And I will give you pastors [shepherds] according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

And it shall come to pass, when you be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says YHWH, they shall say no more, ‘The ark of the covenant of YHWH’: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more.”

Right now, Israelites from around the world are increasingly being brought **“to Zion”** and Israelites are **“multiplied and increased in the land,”** yet many people still think finding the ark of the covenant is important and should be brought **“to mind”** and **“remembered.”** This indicates that the **“pastors according to mine heart”** have not yet been given to the Israelite people.

Then the Egyptian temples were desecrated:

“In 410 [BC] the Elephantine temple was destroyed by the Egyptians, ... the Elephantine priests appealed to the political and religious authorities in Jerusalem, the high priest Johanan and the Persian governor Bagoas (Nehemiah 12:22; Josephus *Ant.* 11:297–301). Apparently, the Elephantine priests received support for reconstruction of the temple, although they were no longer allowed to offer animal sacrifice. A few years later, at the beginning of the 4th century [BC], with the end of the Persian influence in Egypt, the Jewish garrison at Elephantine was moved and the temple abandoned.”

• “*Elephantine Papyri*,” Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary

A second Jewish temple in north Egypt was built at Heliopolis about 170 BC near modern Cairo:

“... the son of Onias, the high priest, who was of the same name with his father, and who fled to King Ptolemy, ... When this Onias saw that Judea was oppressed by the Macedonians and their kings, ... [he] resolved to send to King Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra, to ask permission from them that he might build a temple in Egypt like to that at Jerusalem, and might ordain Levites and priests out of their own family. The chief reason why he was desirous so to do, was, that he relied upon the prophet Isaiah, who lived above six hundred years before, and foretold that there certainly was to be a temple built to Almighty God in Egypt by a man that was a Jew.”

• *Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 13:62–64*

Onias, a high priest, was exiled from Jerusalem. He applied Isaiah 19:18–21 to himself.

“I desire, therefore, that you will grant me permission to purge this holy place, which belongs to no master, and is fallen down, and to build there a temple to Almighty God, after the pattern of that in Jerusalem, and of the same dimensions, that may be for the benefit of yourself, and your wife and children, that those Jews who dwell in Egypt may have a place where they may come and meet together in mutual harmony one with another, and he subservient to your advantages; for the prophet Isaiah foretold that ‘there should be an altar in Egypt to the Lord God’; and many other such things did he prophesy relating to that place.”

• *Josephus, Antiquities 13:67–68*

Onias received permission and funding from King Ptolemy and his sister/wife Cleopatra (a different Cleopatra than that in the time of Julius Caesar and Mark Antony).

“So Onias took the place, and built a temple, and an altar to God, like indeed to that in Jerusalem, but smaller and poorer. ... However, Onias found other Jews like himself, together with priests and Levites, that there performed divine service.”

• *Josephus, Antiquities 13:72–73*

This temple lasted some 243 years from 170 BC. Titus ordered it destroyed in 73 AD (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 7.426).

(A False Samaritan Temple)

There was an illegitimate Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim. The Samaritans were brought to the land by the Assyrians to inhabit the land of the former northern kingdom of Israel. From Babylon and other lands, they were placed in Israelite territory (2 Kings 17:24–41). They began to worship YHWH, but also worshipped the gods of their native lands. They lived in the land of Samaria and were known as Samaritans.

“When it suited their purpose the Samaritans claimed relationship with the Jews, asserting that their roll of the Pentateuch was the only authentic copy; they were equally ready to deny all connection in times of stress, and even to dedicate their temple to a heathen deity (Josephus, *Ant.*, XII, v, 5 [257–264]). In 128 BC, John Hyrcanus destroyed the temple ([Josephus] *Ant.*, XIII, ix,

1 [254–258]). ... **Lapse of years brought no lessening of the hatred between Jews and Samaritans** ([Josephus] **Ant.**, **XX**, **vi**, **1** [118–124]).”

• **“Samaritans,” *McLintock and Strong Cyclopedia***

The Samaritans began construction of their temple on Mount Gerizim during the days of Alexander the Great, long after the Jewish reconstruction. Their temple was still an issue when the Samaritan woman spoke with Jesus at Jacob’s Well:

“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain [Shechem]; and you say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.’

Jesus said unto her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship you know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.’”

• ***John 4:20–22***

Jesus again confirmed the true Temple was in Jerusalem when He spoke to the woman. Many Samaritans became early converts when the apostles later preached to them (Acts 1:8, 8:1, 5, 9, 14, 9:31, and 15:3). The history of the Samaritans before and after the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD, can be found in Dr. Martin’s book, [*The People That History Forgot*](#), free online. It has historical information found nowhere else.

The Hasmonean Reconstruction of the Jerusalem Temple

Long after the Zerubbabel Temple was built, Simon the Hasmonean (who was both king and High Priest) demolished, purified, and enlarged the Zerubbabel Temple. The Jewish Temple was polluted by the Greeks of King Antiochus. Simon the Hasmonean expelled the Greeks and cut down to bedrock the original hill of Zion on which the Solomonic and Zerubbabel Temple stood, destroying what was left of the Zerubbabel Temple. He did this to cleanse the area of all ritual pollution caused by the Greeks.¹⁹

Simon doubled the size of the enclosure from the Solomonic and Zerubbabel structures,²⁰ yet the Hasmonean Temple was at the same location as the Solomonic and Zerubbabel Temple, above and west of the Gihon Spring. Because the ground was cut to bedrock, its new foundation was lower in elevation on Mt. Zion, allowing for a larger structure. Simon had full approval of the leaders and the people of Judea (only the Essenes disapproved).²¹

Temple Expansion by Herod

Herod was appointed as King of Judea by Mark Antony of Rome, and Herod subsequently served Rome faithfully until his death in 1 BC.²² One day Herod learned about the location of King David’s Tomb and the great treasure in the Tomb. It was located in bedrock in the hillside just south of the existing Temple enlarged by Simon the Hasmonean. Herod and two friends tried to access the Tomb. Only Herod escaped alive.²³ He built a memorial at the entrance sealing the Tomb. After his David’s Tomb incursion:

“Now it seemed as if it was because of the attempt which Herod had made upon the tomb (of David) that the state of affairs in his household became worse, whether it was the wrath (of God) that caused just those ills from which he was already suffering to grow even worse and to develop into incurable misfortunes ... or that these misfortunes had come upon him because of his impiety. For the dissension in the palace was like a civil war and the hatred between the

¹⁹ See *Temples*, [Chapter 27: Resistance to Simon’s Rule](#) and [Chapter 28: Simon’s Building Projects](#). For the full details of Simon’s reconstruction of the Temple read chapters 24 through 28.

²⁰ *Temples*, “[Chapter 30: Rebuilding the Temple](#),” note 588.

²¹ *Temples*, [Chapter 27: Resistance to Simon’s Rule](#).

²² *The Star That Astonished the World*, “[Chapter 8: Astronomy and the Death of King Herod](#).”

²³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 7.391–394; 16.181–182. You must put both portions from chapter 7 and 16 together to make an understandable narrative of the tomb excursion.

two sides caused them to outdo each other in calumny [slander, liable].”

• **Josephus, Antiquities 16.188–189**

I propose Herod tried to enter David’s Tomb some time before 23 BC, the year he married Mariamne II and his family problems began. (Herod executed a prior wife named Mariamne.) During that time of family problems that began just after he tried to enter David’s Tomb, Herod got the idea to enlarge and beautify the Temple. Was this a sort of penance to YHWH for his impious act of breaking into David’s Tomb?²⁴ The planning of the Temple expansion would take about three years. Because he doubled the size of the courts of the Temple, the new Holy of Holies and Holy Place were constructed while the old ones still operated. The new Temple was dedicated in 19 BC. The finishing of the rest of the Temple was done over many decades (46 years when Jesus cleansed the Temple in John 2:20).

Jesus’ Body as a Temple

“**And said, ‘This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.’”**

• **Matthew 26:61**

“**And saying, ‘You that destroyed the temple, and built it in three days, save yourself. If you be the Son of God, come down from the cross.’”**

• **Matthew 27:40**

“**Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Then said the Jews, ‘Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?’ But he spoke of the temple of his body.**

• **John 2:19–21**

Two Failed Attempts to Rebuild the Temple

History tells us that there were two attempts to rebuild the Temple after 70 AD. They took place during the 4th century AD.

(1) Co-emperors Constantine I and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan in 313 AD that established legal status of religious benevolence to Christians.²⁵ When Constantine became sole emperor:

“**He caused a reversal of Jewish favoritism by Rome. But this reversal was not begun until about C.E. 324. In that year Constantine gave permission to rebuild the Temple of God at Jerusalem — it was in the form of a prayer to God (Eusebius, Life of Constantine, II.55) and the Jews actually started to build it in C.E. 324 (John Chrysostom, *Against the Jews*, VI). But when some of Constantine’s Christian advisors went to him about the matter, the emperor had his mind changed and he forbade them to continue building the Temple by cutting off the ears of those who were starting the construction (Chrysostom, *Against the Jews*, VI). The Holy Scriptures forbade any maimed person from entering the Temple, let alone work on it (Leviticus 21:17–23). So Constantine cut off the ears of the priests building the Temple. This put a stop to the work.”**

• **Ernest Martin, *Secrets of Golgotha*, chapter 10**

(2) Emperor Julian the Apostate was the nephew of Constantine I. Raised a Christian, he rejected his faith, became a pagan, and continued to be so until his death. He desired to reestablish pagan beliefs and worship and came to hate Christian beliefs. He favored the Jews to spite the Christians. He rescinded the annual half-shekel poll tax tribute required of the Jewish people since 70 AD. He granted Jews permission to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem and supplied funding. Julian reigned three years (360–363 AD) and died

²⁴ The sequence might be: (1) Herod attempts to enter David’s Tomb (*Antiquities* 16.181–182). (2) Severe family problems ensue. (3) Herod seeks to enlarge and beautify God’s Temple. See “[The Location and Future Discovery of King David’s Tomb](#).”

²⁵ An earlier edict of religious toleration was set forth in 311 AD. In 380 AD Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the legal religion of the Roman Empire.

fighting the Persians. Construction on the Temple was halted by the Jews who probably wanted to avoid opposition from Christians when the new emperor was crowned.

Dr. Martin's "[Chapter 12, Ruins of the Temple in Southeastern Jerusalem](#)" in *Temples* gives a fuller presentation of these ill-fated attempts to rebuild the Jewish Temples.

Conclusion

From the Exodus to the beginning of construction of the Temple was 480 years during which the Tabernacle (a movable Temple) was used by Israel (1 Kings 6:1). From the beginning of Solomon's construction to the fall of the Herodian Temple in 70 AD (subtracting about 70 years from the time Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple to the beginning of Zerubbabel's reconstruction), the Temple, or at least sacrifices at Temple sites, operated more or less continually for about 950 years. That is remarkable longevity of just over 1,400 years for a patterned structure to remain in use. Yes, the Temple sometimes was not operating as it was supposed to, or it was run down, or nearly abandoned from lack of care and religious zeal to worship YHWH.

The prophet Jeremiah prophesied about the post-conquest condition of Zion, where the Temple was:

"Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus says YHWH of hosts; 'Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.'"

• **Jeremiah 26:18**

"The house" means the Temple. That condition lasted until the Jews were allowed to return from Babylon to Judea and Jerusalem. Hundreds of years later in the 2nd century BC, the Temple was so run down after the Maccabean liberation of Jerusalem uprising that shrubs had grown in the Temple courts (1 Maccabees 4:38). After 70 AD the same condition as Jeremiah predicted occurred again. The Christian historian Eusebius saw (about 314 AD) that in Jerusalem people were plowing the field where the Jewish Temple sanctuary was located (*Proof of the Gospel* VI.13, VIII.3)²⁶:

"Therefore, it says this, [quoting Jeremiah] 'Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall be as a storehouse of fruit,' a prophecy which was only actually fulfilled after the impious treatment of our Savior. For from that time to this utter desolation has possessed the land; their once famous Mount Sion, instead of being, as once it was, ... is a Roman farm like the rest of the country, yea, with my own eyes I have seen the bulls plowing there, and the sacred site sown with seed. And Jerusalem itself is, ... as the Hebrew has it, a stone-quarry."

In the future I hope to present more about the Temples of YHWH from a future perspective, such as:

- (1) The Temple to come before Jesus returns, the one the antichrist will temporarily occupy.
- (2) The Ezekiel Temple to be built at Shiloh during the 1,000 year reign of Christ.
- (3) New Jerusalem, the huge city which contains a Temple, now called **"the temple in heaven"** (Revelation chapters 15 and 16). New Jerusalem transitions from the old heaven to a new earth (Revelation 3:12, 21:2).
- (4) God the Father and Christ are Temples in themselves (and so are we).
- (5) A layout that relates the basic Temple structures to the eons of time made by the Son (Hebrews 1:2).

David Sielaff, May 2018

Now read the follow-up article, "[God's Temples, Present and Future](#)."

²⁶ Eusebius of Cæsarea, *The Proof of the Gospel: Being the Demonstratio Evangelica of Eusebius of Cæsarea*, trans. W. J. Ferrar, vol. 2, Translations of Christian Literature: Series I: Greek Texts (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 140–141.